

# Zeng Fanzhi

# 曾梵志



*Ideology, Oil/acrylic on Canvas, 2004*

**ShanghART 香格纳画廊**

50 Mognshan Rd. Bldg 16 & 18  
Shanghai, 200060, China  
Tel: 0086-21-63593923  
Fax: 0086-21-63594570  
E-mail: [info@shanghartgallery.com](mailto:info@shanghartgallery.com)  
[www.shanghartgallery.com](http://www.shanghartgallery.com)

**I**N the beginning of his artistic career Zeng Fanzhi painted apocalyptic, expressionist images, thus manipulating modernist compositional effects to intensify his sinister version of reality. His representational work reveals the place of the unconscious, the aberrant, in the construction of experience. The large, clenched hands of his subjects are almost more conspicuous than their stereotyped faces and wide-open eyes. Transcending narrative resolution, these images simply unfold. What Zeng Fanzhi re-creates in his art simulates the fatigue of contemporary experience: the rush to acquire and consume, just to the extent of feeling increasingly alienated and detached. Working in idiosyncratic ways, he reminds us how effective art can be when it collapses these varieties of experience. He traces the eruption of the corporeal into the optical sedition of visual art.



*Countryside No.5, Oil/acrylic on Canvas, 2004*



*Lat Supper, Silkscreen Prints, 2002, 66x120 cm*

Zeng Fanzhi's notorious mask series mark a turn in his aesthetic expression. All the figures in the series appear wearing a white mask, which fuses so closely to the facial features that it is almost transparent as a face covering. While difficult, the masks nevertheless have a peculiar, haunting power. Zeng still paints oversized, gnarled hands, but the tragedy has been superseded by the disruption of order: his figures acting seemingly tense or fearful, as if they were victims of their roles. Through the motif of the mask, Zeng Fanzhi expresses suspended reality. The mood of his work is subtle unsettlement: It often suggests some past violence, recent or old, to which we can unravel clues – but never completely understand. His paintings are much more than sardonically recycled imagery. Zeng Fanzhi delivers an art that feels new, not in its premises but in its brutal, yet refined, vitality and constant renewal. His late images signify a shift in his focus from a formal concern with the representation of existential unsettlement, to an interest in how we imagine ourselves interacting with nature. Still – in his newly developed landscape paintings – there is a notion of permanent escape; like an attempt to inhabit the uninhabitable. These paintings are expressively abstract, held in cool shades of pink, black, and blue, and they represent a tension of failed community and human loneliness. Within these large-scale images there is a notion of fragility and vulnerability; like an attempt to create a terrain of uncertainty that inhabits both characters and landscape depicted. The grand scale of the paintings lends them a certain suggestive and sublime appearance, and when viewed, the paintings constantly seem to evolve and create new particular impressions. The images stand both of reflections of a social reality that are made up of multiple signifying systems, of which the landscape is one.

Zeng Fanzhi was born in 1964 in Wuhan and studied oil painting at the Art Academy there. Today he lives and works in Beijing. Zeng Fanzhi has exhibited widely at acclaimed institutions such as the Shanghai Art Museum, the National Art Museum, Beijing, Kunst Museum Bonn, Germany, Santa Monica Art Centre, Barcelona, Spain, and at the Art Centre, Hong Kong.